
**An Evaluation of Prevocational Competency Skills Impartation for Learners with Hearing Impairments
at Two Schools in Harare**

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ABSTRACT

The study evaluated the prevocational skills being imparted to learners with hearing and ways used to impart the skills. The mixed methods design was used. Data was collected from a representative sample of 10 teachers and 30 learners with hearing impairments using questerviews and focus group discussions respectively. The results showed that woodwork, food and nutrition, fashion and fabrics bakery, art and computers constituted the major prevocational skills areas for learners with hearing impairments. Schools are doing their best to ensure that all students are involved in prevocational education. The major methods used by schools to impart prevocational skills were lecturing, demonstration of processes and students participation in the actual process of making something. Of importance is that some schools upon realizing that students are not gifted academically they are encouraged to do vocational subjects under HEXCO. For improvement the study recommended that learners with hearing impairments need exposure to the outside world and should be involved in career guidance. Teachers should make sure that student with hearing impairment attend these workshops when they are held. It is the duty of the school to see to it that they have a teacher in attendance who will act as their interpreter. Schools were also encouraged to organize educational tours for them on a more regular basis as these tours will help them learn more about the world of employment. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education needs to make a follow up on the issue of the school on the workshops programme and make sure that it is revived. Schools need to work in collaboration with industries and revive the school on the workshops programme.

Key Words

Hearing Impairment, Deaf, Prevocational skills, Competency

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of going to school for every child is to acquire some knowledge and skills that will be used later in life to attain independent living. Having a skill that one can fall back on is the desire of many people with disabilities since the world of work is very competitive. Not many people are too keen to employ people with hearing impairment because they feel that they cannot communicate with them because of their inability to talk and hear. It is the duty of schools to ensure that subjects which will equip learners with prevocational skills are part of their curriculum. Schools have a very big role to play

in shaping the future of the learners and prepare them for an independent life once they are out of the school. Learners on the other hand have to complement the role played by schools by taking an interested part in the development of pre-vocational skills that especially appeal to them. This evaluated prevocational competence by learners with hearing impairment in the Northern Central District Secondary Schools in Harare.

Mapfumo (2001) points out that the vocational world is now complex. No only are jobs difficult to find in third world countries it is almost impossible to come by for people with disabilities. In most third world countries formal employment is hard to come by and there is much talk about the move from job seeking to employment creation and to the informal sector. Therefore prevocational skills are aimed at enabling them to discover their potentialities and interests and also train students for entrepreneurship (self-employment).

Learners with hearing impairment face a lot of challenges when studying academic material because of communication difficulties and also due to the fact that they go to school at a much older age and are not exposed to a lot of learning material early in their lives. The learners need to be equipped with some prevocational skills that they can fall back on in the event that they fail to make it academically. People with disabilities have a right to work and careers of their choices and which they are capable of.

The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) states that everyone has a right to work, to freely choose their employment and to just and favourable working conditions including pay for equal work without discrimination. However people with hearing impairment are faced with all vices due to lack of exposure to skills required in the work place and lack of knowledge on the importance of pre- vocational skills. It is the obligation of the schools to provide students with hearing impairment career guidance in their choices of careers and equip them with pre- vocational skills for vocational training.

According to Hegarty (1988) in Mapepa, Manyowa and Bhebhe (2010) schooling is for all young people and a form of preparation for adult life. Therefore the knowledge and skills acquired at school will help them in making their way into the world of work when they leave school. However for many young people the normal curriculum does not provide sufficient preparation for the world of work let alone independent living. Thus it is equally important that students with hearing impairments should acquire the basic educational skills and also develop vocational interests that will give them a realistic awareness of employment opportunities and help them to achieve personal satisfaction in their future lives. As such this study sought to evaluate the prevocational competence of learners with hearing impairment in the two secondary schools in the northern central district of Harare. The two research questions that underpinned the study are:

- (i) What constitute prevocational skills for learners with hearing impairments?
- (ii) How are schools imparting prevocational skills to learners with hearing impairments?

2.0 Literature Survey

2.1 What Constitute Prevocational Skills?

According to the Wikipedia (2013) vocational education is an education that prepares trainees for jobs at various levels from craft to person in engineering. Pre-vocational skills therefore involve the teaching of these vocational aspects in preparation for further training at a higher level of learning. However,

even with out going for further training the learners who had been equipped with pre-vocational skills can put them to use and make a living out of them.

Vocational education is usually referred to as technical subjects nowadays. The trainee is directly the expertise in a specific or a group of techniques. Vocational education can be introduced at secondary school level or post- secondary school level as it has diversified over the years and now covers areas such as retail, tourism, information technology, cosmetics as well as the traditional craft industries.

As stated in Mapfumo (2001) craft industries are usually based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic related to a specific trade or occupation or vocation. This therefore offers a wide spectrum of employment opportunities for people with hearing impairments. If they are provided with the pre-vocational training and offered career guidance during the process of learning at school they will be in a better position to choose careers or occupations that appeal to them and to which they are suited considering the nature of their disability.

According to Hutchinson, Atkinson and Orpwood (1998) schools must carry out activities to expose children to a whole range of the spectrum of jobs so as to give them as much opportunities as possible. Thus, schools can do a lot in preparing students for vocational training as well as equipping them with important pre-vocational skills that they can fall back on when they leave formal schooling.

The transition period from school to work is a very crucial stage in the lives of learners with disabilities. This is the ideal time for them to be equipped with the skills that will make them fit into the world of work in a less stressful way.

Many children are affected by hearing impairment but this need not get into their way of learning. These learners are as bright as other children and will rapidly learn if they are given the right opportunities and an enabling environment. According to www.ehow.com (2013) children with hearing impairment have developed coping strategies so they can still lead a relatively functional life. The degree of impairment will definitely change the way in which their life develops. Accurate reading of body language, use of gestures and the ability to lip read are all excellent skills to provide to these children.

In Zimbabwe vocational training in schools include skills in carpentry which are covered in woodwork and wood technology, agriculture, food and nutrition, fashion and fabrics, metal work and computer studies. It is also the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's policy that at secondary school level students should take at least one of these practical subjects. Thus we can see that efforts are being made to equip students with skills that can enhance their employability as well as their entry into vocational colleges. Zimbabwe is an agrarian country and because of that background some young learners with hearing impairment may be able to do work related to agriculture and other placements in urban areas. Also Kwasi (1986) advocates that most countries have agro-based economies, thus it would be logical to consider community level training in agricultural related occupations. Thus in Zimbabwe there are a number of colleges where learners with disability can enroll after secondary education examples, of these colleges include Danhiko, Jairos Jiri Centre, St Giles Emerald Hill and Beatrice vocational centre.

In the United Kingdom the Disability Support Services offers vocational services. According to www.excellencegateway.org (2013) online students are prepared for employment in areas such as

building maintenance, cashiering/custom service, office automation, stock and inventory, auto tube specialist, direct care, food service, industrial housekeeping and bookkeeping / clerk training. Thus the goal of each program is to prepare each individual for employment in their chosen field.

In Zimbabwe institutions like the Ruwa National Rehabilitation centre also offers training in areas such as leather work, garment making, type writing, woodwork, bakery and accounting where students with hearing impairment can also enroll to further develop the skills that they would have acquired at secondary school level.

Many children with hearing impairments have academic and cognitive deficiencies due to difficulties in processing language. Therefore such children experience social-emotional functioning difficulties due to communication difficulties. According to the website www.ies.ed.gov (2013)

“A gap exists between the academic achievement of youth with hearing impairment and their peers in the general population.”

Students with hearing impairment often experience educational gaps because their disability is invisible and include communication difficulties. However, for those who have mastered the basic communication competence they tend to do well in their school work and exhibit high levels of competence in their prevocational subjects. According www.deafed.net (2013) online

“As students enter higher levels of education they usually encounter material, context and ideas that are increasingly complex, abstract and sophisticated”.

Some students with hearing impairments are able to keep up academically with their peers. However many students with hearing impairment have academic problems as well as personal, social and career development problems.

2.2 How Schools Can Impart Prevocational Skills To Learners With Hearing Impairments

Schools have a very critical role to play in the lives of children with hearing impairments in ensuring that they get the best services out of the education system in terms of vocational education. From most researches according to Gwitima and Kaputa (2007) vocational education for people with disabilities is the highest order of self- actualization. The schools need to provide students with hearing impairments vocational guidance. As it is defined by Hear and Cramer in Mapfumo (2001),

“Vocational education is a fusion of educational and vocational concerns for assisting students to locate themselves vocationally in the future and at the same time to make effective use of the present educational experience connected to such further choices.”

According to Hurchinson, Atkinson and Orpwood (1998) schools must carry out activities to expose children to a whole range of the spectrum of jobs so as to give them as much opportunities as possible. Thus students need to be well informed about the career path that they can follow and are available to them. The schools have a critical role to play in ensuring that students with hearing impairment are given career guidance and counseling. According to Chakuchichi, Mapepa and Mutasa (2010) effective career guidance requires self- organization and a good knowledge of the problems, issues and information needs of these students. It is important to mention that the students through these

counseling sessions should be able to accept that they would either be employed or should be able to use their skills gained throughout the learning experience to create employment for themselves. Through this the schools can do a lot in giving students with disabilities much preparation for vocational training an employment once they leave formal schooling.

As part of the endeavours to make sure that students get information on various career options many schools and districts organize career days. These forums offer students the opportunities to meet and discuss with prospective employers and other entrepreneurial individuals and higher education personnel. Chimedza and Sithole (2000) highlights that on these days employers and companies, tertiary institutions, career advice service providers and advocacy groups what they do and answer questions to help students in formulating proper work ethics and decisions. The specialist teachers have the mandate of ensuring that students with disabilities are not left out of these activities. The students can then use this information in making informed decisions in their choice of vocational subjects to pursue from their school curriculum.

Apart from this, Gwitimah and Kaputa (2007) suggest that schools can organize trips to companies and factories and other work places so that students can see for themselves the real world of work and its requirements. This will provide the learners with hearing impairments opportunity to experience what it feels like to be at work. They will also have to chance of seeing for themselves what is required of them to do in order to make a living.

The school on the shop floor program is also another option that can be used by schools to ensure that students with disabilities are equipped with vocational skills that they can make use of later in life. Thus schools can work together with companies especially those that specialize in work that relates to the vocational subjects that they offer. The learners will have to put into real practice the theory they would have learnt in their subjects into real production ad they are made part of the production team through this program.

Traditionally it has been the scope of special schools to have a curriculum which has a bias towards the provision of practical subjects. For instance the Jairos Jiri Centre for a deaf in Gweru provides basic primary education as well as training in vocational skills such as tailoring, carpentry and agriculture. In Harare the Danhiko Project also aims at equipping learners with disabilities with as much vocational skills as they can. In most of the inclusive mainstream school learners with hearing impairment are encouraged to participate in the vocational- technical subjects.

3.0 Methodology

A mixed method design was used. The study specifically focused on tow secondary schools that enroll learners with hearing impairments in the Northern Central District. Thus the population of the study included all teachers of practical and technical subjects and students with hearing impairment in the two schools. There were 15 and 120 respectively. Convenient sampling was used to come up with a representative sample of 10 teachers and 30 learners with hearing impairments. Of the ten teachers 4 were Heads of Departments. Questerviews were used to collect data from teachers while focus group discussions were used with the learners.

4.0 Results

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1: Teachers' Qualification in Prevocational Subjects

Teachers	Frequency	Percentage
Prevocational qualification	7	70
Non- qualified	3	30
Total	10	100

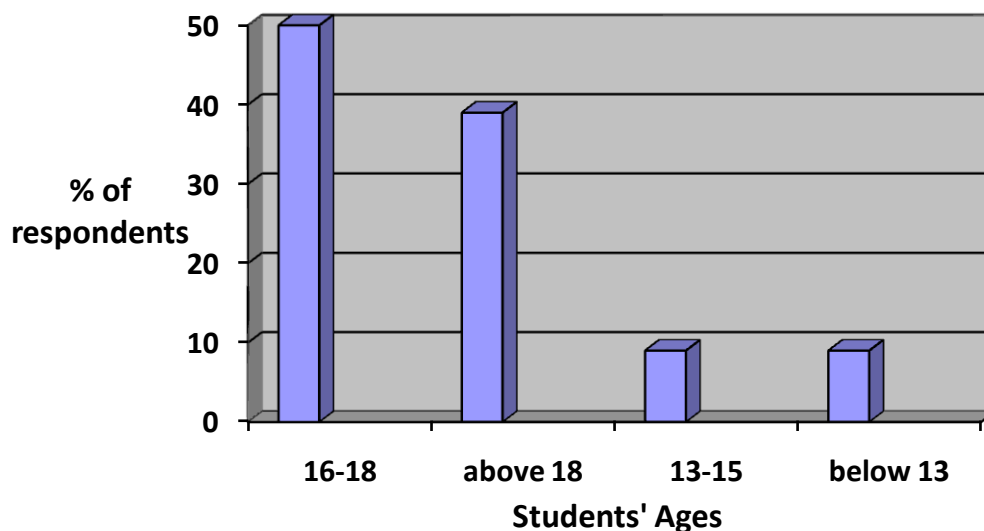
Of all the teachers who responded about 2/3 of them were qualified to teach vocational – technical subjects and only 30% are not qualified. Most of the teachers had the qualification to teach the subjects they were teaching showing they were knowledgeable in their respective areas.

Table 2: Teaching Experience

Years	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 10 yrs	5	50
11-20 yrs	2	20
21-30 yrs	2	20
Above 31	1	10
Total	40	100

A majority of the teachers have been teaching for less than 10 years, followed by 11-20 years and 21-30 years respectively while only 10% have over 31 years of experience. Of the H.O.Ds interviewed they all had been teaching for more than 20 years. Most of the teachers have not yet gained much experience and thus may not be very knowledgeable with regards to exam techniques and skills that may benefit their students. Most of the teachers had diplomas as their highest qualification in vocational training, while 20% had certificates and 20% other qualifications.

Fig 1: Learners' Age Range



On the part of the learners ½ of them are between the ages of 16-18, followed by those above 18, then come those below 13 and 13-15 with 6% respectively. Most of the students were aged between 16 and 18 this is the age where most of them will be leaving school.

Table 3: Learners' Academic Levels

Years	Frequency	Percentage
Form 1	7	23
Form 2	4	14
Form 3	2	7
Form 4	17	56
Total	30	100

Most of the students were in their final year of secondary education doing form four. Followed by form 1, then form 2, and lastly form 3, 6%. Most of the students were in their final year and were soon going to need the skills as they move to join the labour market.

4.2 What Constitute Prevocational Skills For Learners With H.I?

Table 4: Student participation in various subjects

Skill area	Frequency	Percentage
Food and nutrition	10	33
Fashion and Fabrics	20	67
Bakery	15	50
Woodwork	10	33
Computers	25	83
Art	16	53
Technical Graphics	3	100

The students and teachers indicated that they were doing the following subjects Art, Food and Nutrition, Fashion and Fabrics, Bakery, Woodwork, Computers and Technical Graphics. Most of the students were doing computer studies. This showed that they were moving with times and embracing technological advancement. Most of the female students were doing FF (56%) and the male students' woodwork. Technical graphics had the smallest figure indicating the influence if subject allocation due to streaming. However there is a wide variety of subjects that students can take part in and develop their prevocational skills.

Table 5: Skills Taught in Various Subjects

Subject	Skills taught
Food and nutrition/Bakery	Cleaning , housekeeping, culinary skills, baking, stewing , meal planning etc.
Fashion and Fabrics/Garment construction	Pattern making , sewing , pressing, garment construction, mending patch work, etc
Woodwork Carpentry	Joinery, furniture making cabinet making etc.
Computers	Typing designing, graphics, presentation, communication skills etc
Art	Drawing, creativity, imagination, painting , sculpture

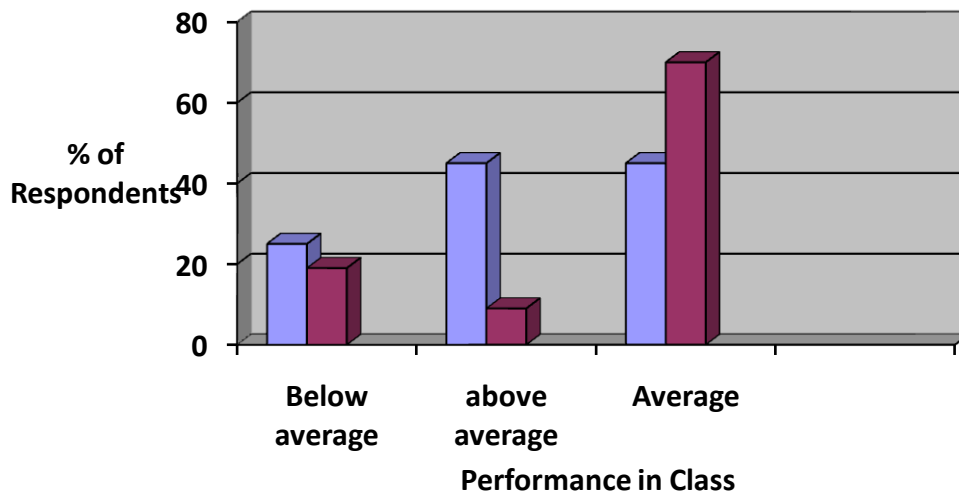
All the teachers gave a breakdown of skills that they teach and these concurred with what the H.O.D.s had to say. The curriculum covers a wide area of skill development thus equipping students with a variety of skills.

Table 6: Class Enrolments

Number of Students	Frequency	Percentage
1-6	2	20
7-15	6	60
16-24	2	20
Total	10	100

A majority of the teachers indicated that they had between 7-15 learners in their classes and these came up to 60% of the total population, 20% had 1-6 and 16-24 students respectively. Most of the teachers had between 7-15 students a figure which was a little bit high considering that the learners need individualized attention.

Fig 2: Learners' Class Performance

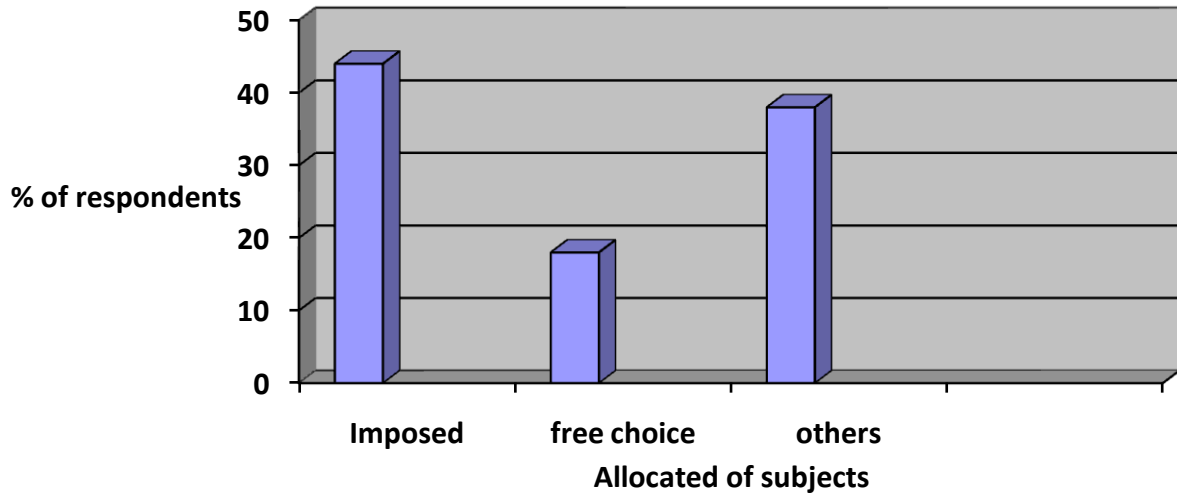


On the performance of learners in the various prevocational subjects 70% of the teachers showed that the performance was average, 20% below average and 10% above average.

On the other hand 38% of the students indicated that their performance was average and above average respectively while 24% indicated they were below average. The H.O.Ds all indicated that they do encounter a few individuals who excel but basically the performance was average. The performance of the majority of the student was average which was not bad as they can learn some skills that they can make use of in future.

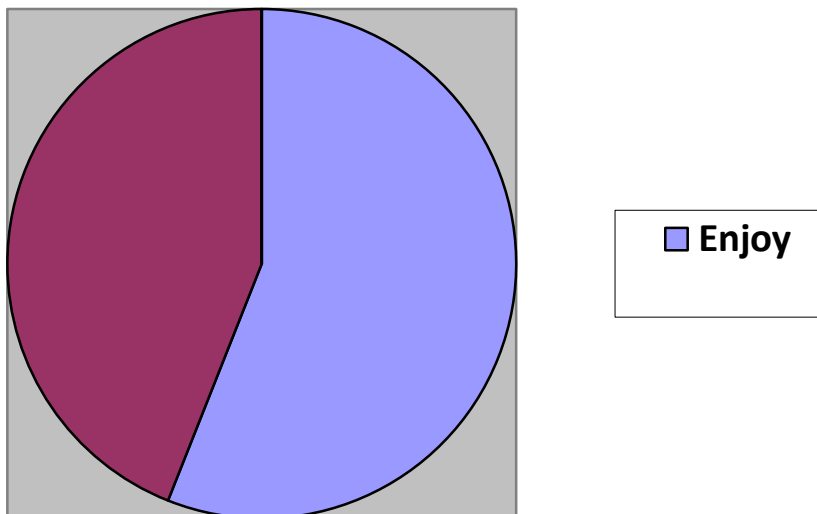
4.3. Imparting Prevocational Skills by Schools

Fig 3: How Schools Are Imparting Prevocational Skills



On the allocation of prevocational subjects 44% of the students indicated that subjects were imposed on them 18% had free choice and 38% indicated other. The H.O.Ds said allocation of subjects was done according to merit. Students were streamed and they were expected to do subjects allocated for their classes. Most of the students indicated they did not have the chance to choose subjects which may have an effect on their overall performance.

Figure 4: Student Attitudes Towards Prevocational Skills



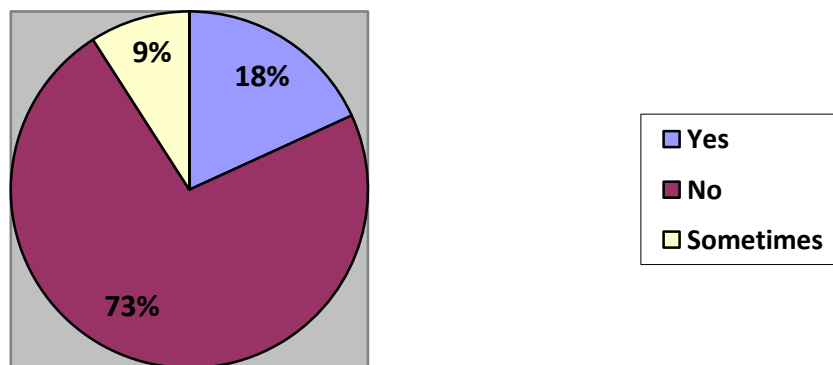
The majority of the students showed that they enjoyed doing the prevocational subjects. These made up more than ½ of the population, 44% said they sometimes enjoy and none indicated they did not enjoy. Most of the students showed that they enjoyed doing the subjects an indication that the subjects were more appealing to them as they get to do the practical part of things.

Table 7: Students’ Participation in Subjects

Attitude towards subject	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	8	80
Negative	2	20
Total	10	100

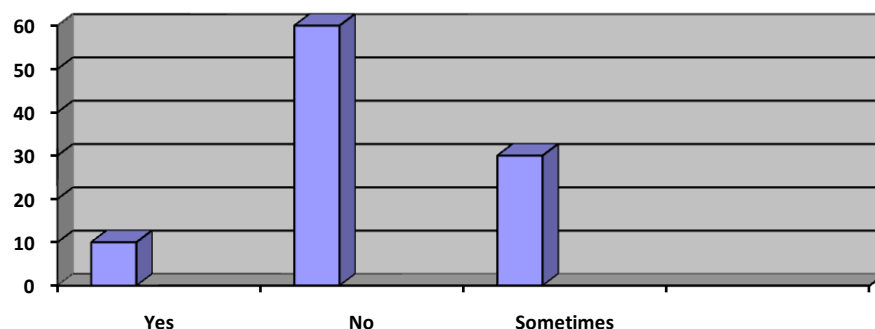
On the other part of teachers a large number of them showed that students had a positive attitude towards the subjects whilst 20% said it was negative. Most of the teachers said students had a positive attitude towards the subjects which showed they liked them.

Figure 5: Attachment in Workplaces



The majority of the teachers indicated that there was no attachment organized for learners in work places. They constituted more than ½ of the population. 20% said they organized and 10% said some time. H.O.D. at one of the schools said they are actively involved in organizing attachment for the learners and at the time of the interview some students were said to be away on attachment. Most teachers indicated that no attachment was organized for the students which was a draw back to the teaching of the subjects as exposure will help them to learn more about the skills they were doing.

Figure 6: Participation in Career Guidance



The teachers mostly indicated that students did not take part in career guidance workshops. Thus 60% said no, 30% sometimes and only 10% said yes. The H.O.D. said they did not take part in the organization of career guidance leaving everything in the hands of the guidance and counseling teachers. Most teachers said students did not attend career guidance workshop showing that learner with hearing impairments were often out of developmental events that can benefit them because of their disability.

Table 8: Participation in the School on the Workshop Programmes

Participation in Programme	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	6	60
No	1	10
Sometimes	3	30
Total	10	100

Most of the teachers 60% showed a positive response that students do participate in the programme, 30% said sometimes and 10% indicated no. From the interview all the H.O.Ds said they participated in the school on the workshop programme. However they all concurred that their schools had not participated in one in a long time. Most of the teachers showed a positive response, but the huddle has been the economic meltdown which has resulted in the closure of companies resulting in the programme dying a natural death.

Table 9: Organisation of Educational Tours

Organisation of tours	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	6	60
No	0	0
Sometimes	4	40
Total	10	100

Most of the teachers said they do organize tours for their students, while 40% indicated that sometimes do and none said they did not organize tours for students. As for the time for occurrence 70% of the teachers indicated that there has been no tour organized in two years- time and 30% said their resent tour was last year. The schools though they were organizing tours for their children, they were taking too long, which resulted in some of the learners missing out on these tours.

5.0 Discussion

The study wanted to find out how competent the learners were and the challenges that they encounter as well as possible solutions to the challenges. Basically students with hearing impairment are faced with a lot of challenges when it comes to employment hence the study was carried out to establish their competent levels in prevocational skills that they can make use of in case they fail to get employment or they decide to start their own businesses.

Of all the teachers who responded a majority of them were qualified to teach prevocational subjects. However, only 20% of them were qualified to teach students with special needs. As a result this can have negative impact on the learners as teachers lack the expertise to handle learners with disabilities. Though the teachers were highly qualified the absence of a qualification in special needs education would compromise their work. Learners with special educational needs have individualized special needs that an ordinary teacher may find a handful and difficult to understand and deal with. According to the Americans with disabilities Act (1990) teachers are required to make an individualized programme for each child with special educational needs. To the ordinary teacher this may be too much work as he/she is already burdened with a large class and to include learners with special needs would just compound their work something which they do not take kindly. Also the research showed that most of the teachers were still new in the field of work with a few years of experience. This can have negative impact on their performance as years of experience help them to perfect their teaching skills. More years of experience help them to learn more about what works best for their various students.

According to the research findings 80% of the teachers were qualified to teach prevocational subjects but a majority of them were not trained to teach special needs education. The research also found out that most of the schools offer the following subjects as part of the prevocational training, fashion and fabrics, food and nutrition, garment construction, bakery, woodwork, computer studies, technical graphics and art. These subjects expose students to a wide array of skills that they can make use of to develop a career or act as a hobby. This collaborates with Hutchinson, Atkinson and Orpwood when they mentioned that schools must expose students to a whole range of the spectrum of jobs so as to give them as many opportunities as possible. However, the way in which learners were allocated these subjects tend to disregard the interests of the students. If students were given the opportunity to participate in the subjects that appeal to them most maybe this would raise their levels of competence in the subjects. The numbers of learners in the classes were manageable with the dominating figure being 7-15. Therefore teachers could afford to give all the students the one on one attention required in the subjects and for learners with disabilities.

Of all the teachers who responded 70% of them indicated that students' performance was average. On the other hand the students who responded indicated that 38% were average and another 38% above average giving us a total of 76%. Thus the rating of the teachers and students were within close range and their performance was not really bad. This showed that to the student it is an area that they prioritized and endeavour to do well. The positive attitude they showed towards the subjects as shown by 80% of the teachers' works for the better in terms of performance in the subjects. This is a positive move as the aim of prevocational training is to ensure that learners have skills that they can fall back on in hard times. According to the research findings the performance of the learners with hearing impairment in these subjects was not all that bad. Being average and above average shows that if they are given support and attention their performance can be improved for the better. The most

encouraging findings was that students enjoy participating in these subjects and had a positive attitudes towards the subjects. This is also supported by Blumn (1979) in Badza and Chakuchichi (2000) who stated that, "the employability of people with disabilities is dependent on the successful development vocational skills in combination with desired personal social skills." Therefore having a positive attitude can lead to the successful development of the skills.

The area of career guidance seems to be neglected when it comes to learners with hearing impairments. More than half of the teachers (60%) indicated that their learners did not take part in career guidance days. This implied that the students were missing out on a lot of information with regards to career development. Participation in career guidance workshops was not being taken seriously when it comes to students with H.I. The main reason why teachers leave out these students was that of communication. Students may have to require the services of an interpreter something that the teacher did not want to be involved in. Career guidance workshops are organized for the benefit of all students and it is the duty of every teacher to make sure that all students are involved and not just leave everything to the career guidance teachers. Teachers need to treat these occasions with the seriousness that they deserve. This is in contradiction with the United General Assembly Resolution 52, which is concerned about the employment and sustainable livelihood as a priority for action on equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities. There is no equalization of opportunities to talk about if they are denied the chance to attend to some of these occasions. Even though most of the teachers indicated that they organize educational tours for their students, the time frame when these had occurred leaves a lot of to be desired. A period of two years is very long as this only means that some learners will get to leave secondary school without having the chance to take part in an educational tour.

The response of teachers on participation on the school on the workshop was very encouraging, 60% of the teachers said they were involved in the program. However the most painful part as gathered from the interview with some of the heads of departments is that their school had not participated in one in a record time of more than five years. Once again this implied that for some students they get to pass from one to four without having been involved in one let alone get to know what it is all about. Thus they are denied the exposure that comes with participating in these workshops. For those who get the chance to partake in these programs (30%) they are an eye opener whether one decides to start their own business or seek employment. It is clear that the issue of attachment and participation in the school on the workshop programme have been shelved. They are there on only paper and only a few schools like Emerald Hill School for Deaf are participating in them. The reason why the school on the workshop programme was suspended is due to the economic meltdown which has resulted in many industries closing down.

6.0 Recommendations

- Students with hearing impairments need exposure to the outside world and should be involved in career guidance. Teachers should make sure that student with hearing impairment attend these workshops when they are held. It is the duty of the school to see to it that they have a teacher in attendance who will act as their interpreter.
- Schools should organize educational tours for them on a more regular basis as these tours will help them learn more about the world of employment. Teachers at departmental level should ensure that at least once a year they organize an educational tour for the benefit of the learners.

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education needs to make a follow up on the issue of the school on the workshops programme and make sure that it is revived. Schools need to work in collaboration with industries and revive the school on the workshops programme.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education also need to make it a policy that teachers are trained in sign language and other areas of disabilities when they go for initial teacher training at college. This will ensure that no children are disadvantaged because of the lack of qualified personnel.
- All teachers need to learn sign language hence the need to organize more seminars and workshops on sign language. Thus schools in their clusters should regularly organize these workshops so that all teachers are exposed to sign language.
- The Ministry also need to ensure that there are two resource room teachers at a school so that they can take turns in accompanying students to other lessons and help with communication.
- Also schools need to consider agriculture among the subjects they offer as our country is agrarian and so students can benefit from various sectors that are linked to agriculture.
- The Government must also ensure that more speech therapists are trained so as to overcome the shortage that is currently there and also move towards a situation whereby each school with students with hearing impairments has visiting therapist on a regular basis.
- The Government should embrace fully the technological advancement and diversify the curriculum for computer studies so that they include computerized instructions which are individualized to afford the learners some independence as they would be able to work on their own pace.
- There is also need for more awareness campaigns so as to root out negative attitudes towards people with hearing impairment as this affects their development of self-esteem. This can be done at school level as well as national level through the various ministries that work with children with disabilities.

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